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RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1964
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RHMFISS/DEPT OF HOMELAND SECURITY WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1892
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 2975
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 001944

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TAGS: [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [BT](#) [IN](#) [NP](#)

SUBJECT: EXIT PERMIT PROCESS FOR RESETTLEMENT OF BHUTANESE

REFUGEES NOT YET CLEAR

Classified By: Ambassador Nancy J. Powell. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

1. (C) In meetings with Assistant Secretary for Population, Refugees, and Migration Sauerbrey October 31, Nepal's Home and Foreign Ministers expressed receptiveness to streamlining the exit permit process for Bhutanese refugees, although they could not state what the new process would be or when it might be in place. The Ministers repeatedly requested that Assistant Secretary Sauerbrey put pressure directly on Bhutan, and via India, to repatriate refugees. The participants in the meetings were pleased that the recently established police posts had improved camp security, but recognized the potential for anti-resettlement activists to still cause problems.

Request for Expedited Exit Permits

2. (C) In meetings October 31, Assistant Secretary for Population, Refugees, and Migration Sauerbrey pointed out to both Home Minister Sitaula and Foreign Minister Pradhan that, as the United States begins to process at least 15,000 refugees per year, the current convoluted exit permit process will quickly bring the program to a halt. Assistant Secretary Sauerbrey explained that no additional GON

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processing is needed, and that it would be preferable to the U.S. if the Government of Nepal (GON) simply issues an exit permit based upon documentation the U.S. provides them. Sauerbrey offered to both Sitaula and Home Secretary Mainali to have the U.S. pay to have a Nepali official co-located with the Overseas Processing Entity in Damak to issue exit permits. Assistant Secretary Sauerbrey also requested that the 59 extremely vulnerable individuals (EVIs) whom the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has already cleared, and who have been waiting for their exit permit for months be processed in time to spend Christmas in the United States.

Receptiveness, but no Promises

13. (C) While the Nepali Ministers offered to be helpful, none of them could say when a new procedure would be in place or what it would entail. They agreed to discuss whether an official could be deputed to Damak and whether an exit permit could be issued on the spot. Minister Pradhan offered to raise the issue of expedited exit permits with Prime Minister Koirala once the current domestic political impasse is resolved. She indicated a cabinet decision on exit permits was probably necessary to implement any change. Both Sitaula and Pradhan acknowledged the request to process the EVIs, but made no promises.

Put Pressure on Bhutan, and India...

14. (C) Home Minister Sitaula, Home Secretary Mainali, and Foreign Minister Pradhan all repeatedly requested that Assistant Secretary Sauerbrey put pressure on the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGOB) to resolve the refugee issue. While all expressed support for third-country resettlement, they did not want resettlement to reduce the pressure on Bhutan to repatriate the refugees. Assistant Secretary Sauerbrey confirmed that she would continue to press the RGOB on the issue. Both Ministers expressed concern that Bhutan was preparing to expel an additional 80,000 ethnic Nepalis and that pressure from the U.S., and India, could help prevent that outcome. They also viewed India as having some responsibility for the current refugee situation since the refugees transited India on the way to Nepal and India could exert pressure on the RGOB if it chose to do so. In a subsequent meeting, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Representative Abraham Abraham suggested that sustaining the Government of India's current acceptance of the resettlement

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program would be an acceptable outcome, and if India could be encouraged to take a more active role that would be even better.

To at Least Accept Repatriation of Minors and Elderly

15. (C) Abraham and UNHCR Durable Solutions Officer Kim Roberson hoped that the RGOB would be willing to take back unaccompanied minors and elderly along with those classified as legitimate citizens of Bhutan in the camp census. Assistant Secretary Sauerbrey followed up on the issue of unaccompanied minors in a meeting later on October 31 with Jean Paul Corboz of the International Committee of the Red Cross. Corboz explained that ICRC does not have a presence in Bhutan and thus would not be able to provide much assistance. He also feared that if the government learned of efforts to trace family members of refugees that the RGOB would expel any family members found.

Questions About Resettlement Program

16. (C) Both the Home and Foreign Ministers asked whether families could stay together, who and how many were ineligible to be resettled, and where and how the refugees would be resettled. They were pleased to hear that families would be resettled as a group and interested in Assistant Secretary Sauerbrey's explanation of how the U.S. side of the

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program functioned. They were understanding that a few individuals might be deemed ineligible due to criminal background or security reasons. Minister Pradhan was also concerned about the cost of the program to refugees, particularly when other countries offering resettlement operate programs without charge to the refugees. Assistant Secretary Sauerbrey's explanation of how the loan repayment

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operates attempted to address her concerns.

Progress in the Camps

17. (C) All participants in the meetings were pleased that the recently established police posts had improved camp security, but recognized the potential for anti-resettlement activists to still cause problems. Secretary Mainali reported that he had sent a letter to the Chief District Officer (CDO) in Jhapa instructing him to accompany Assistant Secretary on her upcoming visit to the camps. Mainali added that, at the conclusion of the meeting, he would call the CDO to reinforce and reiterate that he was to cooperate with the U.S. delegation.

Comment

18. (C) While they generally seem sincere in supporting third-country resettlement, confusion still exists among the Nepalis about the role and responsibilities of the Home Ministry versus the Foreign Ministry in the exit permit process. UNHCR noted to Assistant Secretary Sauerbrey that it has experienced similar confusion among the ministries and inability to streamline the process. At a minimum, progress on exit permits will require consensus between the Home Ministry and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As Minister Pradhan noted, it may also require involvement and approval by the Prime Minister and cabinet. Further work needs to be done to prevent a backlog of cases. Post will continue to engage the Home Ministry and Ministry of Foreign Affairs with UNHCR to implement a streamlined exit permit process.

19. Assistant Secretary Sauerbrey cleared this message.
POWELL